



# The Daily Oregonian

FRIDAY MORNING, MAY 17, 1881.

## A PATENT FENCE.

From the great agricultural country, and particularly at the west of the Mississippi river, protests are being made against the laws in which the patent laws are used to foster and protect monopolies which prey upon the agricultural industry. Perhaps no invention ever has been of more value to the people than the production of wire fencing and barbed wire, and it is provided with the barbs as to be a barrier against animals of the farm. Large part of the expense of making and keeping up a farm is due to the necessity of fencing; and the barbed wire offers the best substitute yet employed for fences of old style, which were congenital with great labor, and where timber was scarce, with great expense. Yet the use of this barbed fence is not at all new. The idea has been utilized in one way or another ever since agricultural began. Within the last few years one improvement rapidly followed another, till the result was a number of patents, all resting on the form of fastening of the mesh. Not long since the original patent and one or two others were purchased by a manufacturing establishment at Worcester, Mass., whereupon the original inventors, and with some slight change derived from the others, was released as new, and in the mean time other persons produced others, and a lively competition was at once begun. The holders of the original and consolidated patent at once began to sue to suppress all other manufacturers. This suit was decided last October in favor of the complainant. All other manufacturers have been enjoined, and last January there was a conference in Chicago, at which it was said the successful patentees submitted terms upon which all other manufacturers would agree to take out licenses and pay a royalty for the privilege. This was established one of the greatest monopolies ever created under the patent laws. It promises, indeed, to be pecuniarily the greatest that ever existed in the United States. In nearly all the great agricultural states consisting of farms and men protecting against the artificially created monopoly. The "royalty" which must be paid to the Massachusetts company is three cents a pound. Every other establishment, that turns out the barbed wire must pay this. Last year 40,000 tons of wire were sold. This gives the monopoly a clear gain over former profit of \$2,000,000 a year. It is a tax to the nation on the agricultural industry of the country. The Prairie Farmer, published at Chicago, denounces the manipulation of the patent laws under which a principle of law which has been the common property of mankind for all time, is converted into an engine of fraud and oppression. The same journal and many others call for an act of congress to declare all such patents "forfeited to the people." The Chicago Tribune says: "With the royalist act aside, and the manufacturer made free, this barbed wire fence can be produced in every state of the country, and sold to consumers at one-half its present price. In such case the 40,000 tons of 1880 would be 200,000 tons in 1881, and the manufacturer would thus be increasing until the sales of such fence in the country would be up into the hundreds of millions. If this development to be arrested by a mere pretense of originally a shadow of inventive genius, demanding its blood-money for every rod of these millions of rods of wire?" It is pretty certain that the grangers are going to send up a demand to Congress on this issue.

## MR. BOATHORN'S SHIP-BUILDING.

Mr. John Boathorn, the shipbuilder of the Pacific in his article in the North American Review, which we have herefore briefly quoted, gives a particular view as to what is necessary to successful ship-building in the United States. He asserts that the real difference in the cost of English and American ships is due to the high wage of American labor; and he seems to desire that this difference be offset by subsidies out of the treasury. This would be nothing more than a proposition to tax the whole labor of the country to keep up the rates of labor in a single industry. But we wish to state his suggestion, rather than offer criticism upon them. He proposes that ship-building be encouraged in the United States in these ways:

First. Free taxation. "It is not," says Mr. Boathorn, "what it costs to get the ship afloat, but what it costs to keep her there, under the American system of taxation, interest and other, that prevents us from owning ships in competition with foreign owners." American ship owners are taxed two and a half per cent on their capital stocks; English owners but one per cent on net profits. Thus, in an instance given of two companies having equal capital and making equal profits, the American company pays \$50,000 tax, while the English company pays but \$1600.

Second. Government encouragement. France extends this by giving a bounty for every ton of shipping built in French yards for foreign trade. England reaches the same end by paying heavy mail subsidies. Since 1837 she has paid \$225,000,000 in this way. America discourages all such enterprises by paying American vessels two and a half cents a mile for foreign postage and fifty-seven and a half cents a mile for domestic postage. This, it should be explained, is not the basis of payment, but it is what the respective payments amounted to last year.

According to Mr. Boathorn's summing up the whole question resolves itself into this: Whether this country, with more needs to carry, with more need of ships, with more raw material to use, with better natural advantages, with the best skilled labor and with more coast to defend than any other country, shall be independent and build its own ships, thus encouraging all its industries and protecting its own labor, on which the foundations of that government were laid, or shall become dependent entirely on a foreign nation for ships and let its own workingmen starve for themselves."

Mr. Boathorn seems to forget that we have been trying protection till we have demonstrated that it will not enable us to build ships. It would not be easy to show why we should adopt the subsidy system, which would simply amount to taxation of other industries to further this one. The workingmen engaged in shipbuilding who are protected under our present system are extremely few. The workingmen of the great agricultural class who would be favored by free trade in ships, under which additional facilities for exporting the products of their labor would be gained, are numbered by millions.

## THE SPOILSMEN'S FIGHT.

There are indications that the vice-president will desert the Conkling service and "stand in" with Garfield. No express declaration of this purpose has been made but Mr. Arthur has in various personal messages shown a regard for the views of the president and a corresponding lack of attention to Conkling's interests. The vice-president is not a statesman. He is a stalwart of the machine-type, and his allegiance to the New York boy is in the line of machine duty merely, not prompted by any decided principle, or even a strong personal motives. His Conkling's man became Conkling's man, and will now be Conkling's man. He is a Conkling's man, in Conkling's cause. The animating motive of all political effort on the part of such men as Arthur is the love of partitions, they readily fall in line under the man who happens to be at the top. It is evident that Conkling can do nothing to retain his followers at least for four years, and probably never. He is certain to meet death in the present fight, and most other quickly subside into a silent nothing during Garfield's administration.

He is a man of great energy and tact, which may give him personal prominence among nothing else. The machine with a good share of official spirit and with less tact, can do no better thing than to stand still, but with a paralyzing effect on the machine and himself. Mr. Conkling has no patronage beyond the friendship of a single colleague. Even if he should win, the present fight the machine will be a quiet one. He has so antagonized the aristocracy that he can never hope for favors. His power is gone, and for four years. These considerations can but affect Arthur and the several other stalwart leaders through out the country, and we may expect a general muted silence for the administration. Already has the support of the best senators, the best state leaders and the majority of the republican party and of the people, and the disturbing few will soon be obliged to make up.

A bulletin published by the census department last week shows the great development of the iron and steel interests in the upper south states in 1880. West Virginia increased its production from 72,000 tons to 171,000 tons. This state has stored away in her mountains iron ore and coal that Pennsylvania and Indiana are compelled to go to the railroads to even a way to the market to make her as rich as her northern neighbor. Alabama, owing to the fact that she has already cut off by railroads her production in the enormous ratio of 222 per cent, Georgia 261 per cent, Tennessee, 125 per cent, New Mexico, 43 per cent. A singular fact in this report is that only three states had but one-tenth their yield of iron during the last ten years, one of which is North Carolina, notwithstanding its enormous iron deposits and the low price of labor. The simple reason of this is that the Utah and Nevada mountain ranges in which the iron lies are as yet unopened by railroads. Much of the iron-bearing territory is, however, already owned by the ironing aristocrats, and will easily be worked, though it is covered by the primitive forest and given up to the possession of bears, wolves and mountain lions.

The grain movement this year from the west via the Mississippi river and the Gulf of Mexico has been merely experimental. It was asserted that grain could be shipped by this route for one-fourth less than by rail to the Atlantic and thence by ship, the common way, but the practical trial has proved otherwise. If ships could be loaded from the river at St. Louis and steam directly down the river and across the ocean, the water could hardly be much cheaper, but that cannot be done. The grain must be first loaded on barges, then drawn by a heavy drag to New Orleans, then stored in warehouses and finally put aboard ship. The cost of handling is great and the waste a very important item. Warehouse charges are excessive and delays are annoying and prevent ready sale. It is not probable that the river route will very seriously compete with railroads.

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